

SENATOR
Karen Keiser
33RD LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Dear Neighbors:

You may have noticed that this newsletter is arriving later than usual. I had proposed to include voter registration forms in this newsletter to constituents last December, the Legislative Ethics Board took my request under consideration and has just issued its ruling that such voter registration activities should not be allowed. Although I disagree with the Board's eventual ruling, I will abide by it.

I continue to believe that voting is a civic duty of every citizen. I know, it's hard to find time as we try to balance the demands of home and work. And the easy temptation is to leave politics to others. But history shows us just how critical our precious right to vote can be, and free participation in the elective process is much too important to take for granted.

The U.S. Constitution begins with the words: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union..." To me, that sets an expectation for all Americans to work to make government better. And you can't make it better if you don't participate.

I ask you to remember that to truly have a "government of the people, by the people, for the people," we must all participate in the process.

Sincerely,



Senator Karen Keiser
33rd District



I appreciate your letters and calls on legislative issues. Please let me know if I can help on matters before state agencies.

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- Financial Services,
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- Health & Long-Term Care

New Primary System in Place

Once you've registered to vote, you'll be able to participate in both the primary and the general elections.

After the courts determined that our state's popular "blanket" primary was unconstitutional, the Legislature considered several proposals to replace it. I supported the "Top Two" plan, which advances the top two vote-getters to the general election regardless of party.

We also included a fallback option, known as the "Montana" system, to ensure that a process was in

place even if there were further legal challenges. In fact, Governor Locke vetoed the sections of the bill creating a Top Two primary, citing concerns about its constitutionality. He approved the "Montana" portion of the legislation.

In the Montana system, voters may only choose among candidates from a single party in partisan races in the primary election. Your choice of parties is completely confidential. No party registration is required. The Grange filed a lawsuit saying the governor's partial veto should be declared unconstitutional and the

(continued on next page)



Improving the quality of life for South King County residents

Making Health Care Affordable

With costs continuing to escalate, and state resources remaining relatively flat, our health care system is under great strain: The number of people in Washington without insurance is growing; those who have insurance are paying more; and small businesses, in particular, are struggling to find affordable coverage for their workers. During the 2004 session, we:

- Provided health coverage, workers' compensation coverage and a 50-cent per-hour raise to the state's home health care workers.
- Strengthened the health care safety net by increasing support for community clinics by \$2.5 million and boosting grants to hospitals by \$10 million so they are partially compensated for treating the uninsured.
- Allowed insurance companies to offer an "economy plan" to businesses with 50 or fewer employees. Access to this limited health care plan may help small business afford to offer health care for employees. The small business lobby in Olympia decided the bill didn't go far enough and is circulating its own initiative on the issue.



Improving Patient Safety

Only a systemic effort by our health care providers to identify and correct potential errors can help ensure that our families are healthy and safe. I believe we must look at everything from drug labeling to peer review committees. That's why I sponsored legislation (Senate Bill 6210) to improve patient safety. I was pleased that both the Senate and House approved this bill, which was signed by the governor into law.

Senate Bill 6210 directs hospitals to share information and documents, including complaints and incident reports, so that different institutions can work together to improve safety, and reduce medical errors. Medical errors are responsible for thousands of patient deaths every year, and are considered the eighth leading cause of death in the country.

I was disappointed that three other patient safety bills I had introduced, which addressed whistleblowers, required law enforcement reporting, and gave more teeth to the Medical Quality Assurance Commission, did not pass the Legislature.

(New Primary System Still Unsettled—continued)

original bill—containing the "Top Two" primary—restored. However, the Washington Supreme Court recently denied the Grange's claim. They are also circulating an initiative to adopt a "Top Two" system. If it gets enough signatures, the initiative will be on the November general election ballot.

My support for the "Top Two" system is based on my belief that voters want to elect people, not political parties. The "Top Two" system would have resulted in the two strongest candidates advancing to the general election, regardless of their party. That makes the most sense to me.

Improving Education

Providing a quality public education is a smart investment. It prepares our students for the demands of the 21st century workplace, so that they have the skills Washington businesses are seeking. In addition, worker retraining gives people the opportunity to transition to new career paths and pays dividends to state and local economies by getting people off unemployment.

A highlight of the 2004 session was the successful passage of a measure (House Bill 2195) to allow students up to four chances to retake the state's Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exam. Previously, students were only given one opportunity to pass. Rather than water down the standards, we opted to give students additional attempts to pass the test. Starting with the class of 2008, high school students must pass the WASL to graduate.

Learning Financial Literacy

Benjamin Franklin said “a penny saved is a penny earned,” but that message is not getting through to many Washington students. Instead, the lesson they learn from our consumer society is: “buy now, pay later.”

Because many students never learn the basic concepts of money, they can become easy prey for credit card companies who offer them easy credit, often starting them on a downward spiral of increasing debt. The growth of pay-day loan and

pawn shops is another side of this disturbing trend.

I’ve worked for the past two years with the financial institutions in our state to create a public-private partnership to assist teachers and school districts to develop true literacy for financial decision-making. The goal is not to add another mandate or even another class, but to identify core knowledge that can be integrated into basic math, reading and critical thinking skills. Just consider the lessons of compound interest! This approach can be applied to elementary, middle and high school. The partnership

will also find ways to fund teacher training and curriculum materials, so the inclusion of financial literacy doesn’t become a financial hardship for our schools. Our financial literacy bill has been signed into law by Governor Locke, and I have been appointed to the public-private partnership, which will begin its work this summer.

Sound money management is a basic requirement for being productive and responsible. Our children, and our society, can’t afford the cost of financial illiteracy.

Not So Tough! Banning Toughman

We succeeded in banning extreme fighting, known as “Toughman” contests, in our state. I attended a Toughman event at the Tacoma Dome and was appalled by what I saw. There’s a vast difference between professional boxing, which is truly a sport, and Toughman. Professional boxing in Washington is regulated by the Department of Licensing, which oversees everything from potential

match-ups to ringside physicians. Toughman events were not regulated under state law. There have been at least 13 reported deaths nationwide as a result of these contests, most recently in 2003 in Florida, where Stacy Young, a 30-year-old mother of two, was fatally injured in front of her children. By outlawing these events, we’ve ensured that the next Toughman fatality won’t occur in Washington. I was gratified that the Legislature and the governor supported my effort to rid our state of this kind of exhibit for profit and pain.

Airport Wetlands at Risk

I opposed Senate Bill 6173, which would have allowed new public-use airport development projects (such as Sea-Tac’s third runway) to cause serious environmental damage to surrounding wetlands. This bill could have led to land use practices that are incompatible with federal and state environmental requirements.

Fortunately, Senate Bill 6173 died in the House.

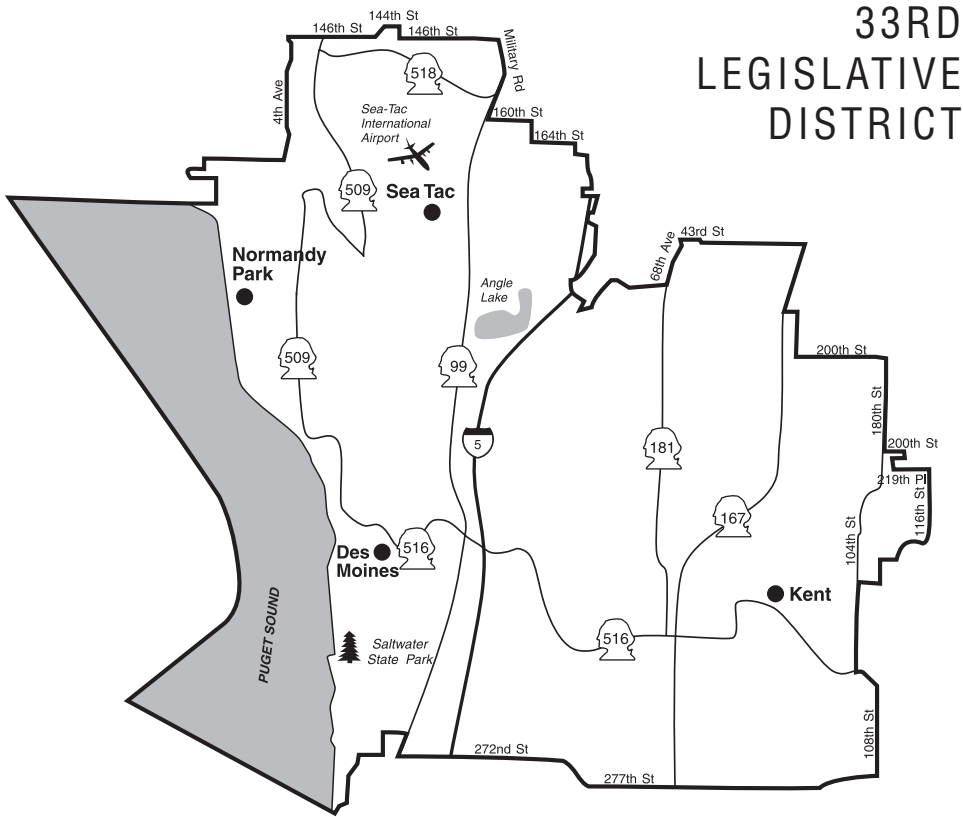
What’s Important To You?

In order to be an effective representative, I need to know what issues are important to you. Please take a moment to provide me with your top three concerns. You can send them to me by e-mail at keiser_ka@leg.wa.gov, or by mail by filling out the form below and returning it to my Olympia office. Thank you for your input!

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



33RD
LEGISLATIVE
DISTRICT



LEGISLATIVE
UPDATE
FROM SENATOR
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